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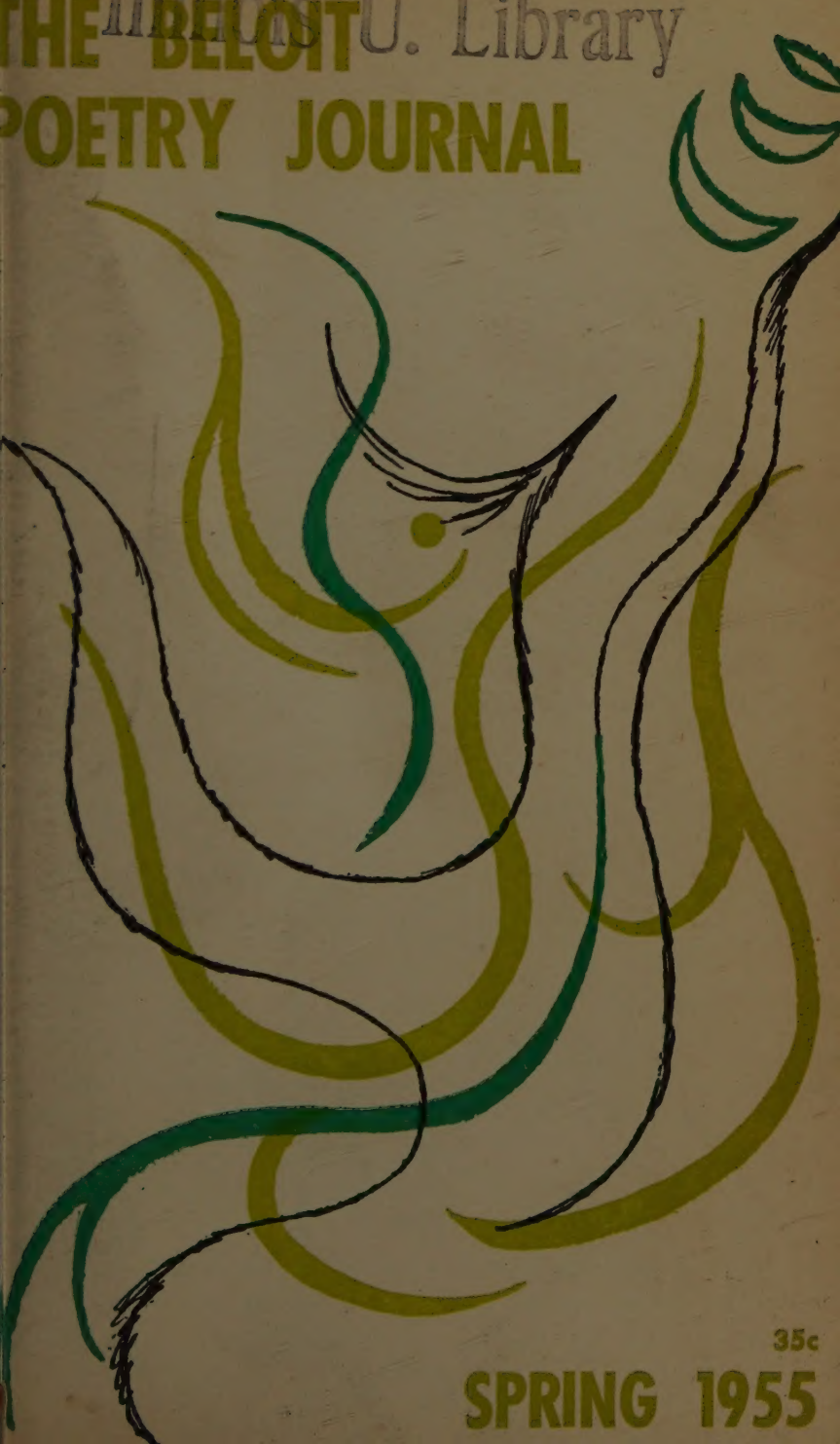
THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL



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SPRING 1955

Cover Design by Franklin Boggs

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL
is published quarterly by Beloit College, Beloit, Wisconsin. Subscription rates are $1.35 for one year and $3.50 for three years. Manuscripts are solicited but cannot be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. EDITORIAL BOARD: Chad Walsh, Robert H. Glauber, David M. Stocking, David Ignatow. Associates: Editorial — Lou B. Noll, Marion Kingston, Myron Ochshorn; Art — Franklin Boggs. Copyright, 1955, by The Beloit Poetry Journal. National distributor: B. de Boer, Hoboken, New Jersey.

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL
Volume 5 - Number 3 Spring 1955

LES DERNIERS JOURS d'ELOISE

Beside the wall, in yellow linen,
Where stone engenders fall and spring,
She cannot but mistake as human
The heartbeat of each living thing.

From pity, in another place,
Abelard, come to mind alone,
Still wore his manhood in his face,
Till mind and all went back to bone.

And beauty that she scarcely gave,
Now past contagion or demands,
Can find in stone the heart to save
A love it no more understands.

At last, bewildered dignity,
Lying thin upon the aging bone,
Relents, and all her losses flee
In shadows lengthening from stone.

Now days themselves are but the sound
Of love lines ceaselessly begun
In mind, unmoved and unprofound,
Smoothing against oblivion.

Moore Moran

2

MOVING

We clanked through the old house making more
Noise than we could. Under the basement stairs
We found a chest. My brother Eddie bore
It on his back, stumbling, a great black bear,
Up to the parlour and dropped it on the floor.
We stood back while mother tried her keys.
Brandy eyed and pale she found the one
And up came the lid. We three on our knees
Went through her goods. I thought it would be fun.
On top an old dead fox fur stared up.
Beneath was wedding candy that she'd kept
And lace, careful and grey, and a little silver cup.
Then brown warped photos over which she wept.
A boy in knickers had moved and blurred his head.
It was Eddie. Mother seemed beautiful as a bride.
"You do remember him, Edward?" she said,
Referring to the stranger at her side.
He lied and said he did and heaved from the room
To get his gin. "Edward was ten when
They crammed the only good man in the tomb."
She had the years all wrong, but then
She never seemed to count the years since he died.
Eddie'd been five and I an infant in her grief.
"Now we leave this house, this life," she almost cried.
It was Eddie who made the parting brief,
Tumbling the great chest back down the stairs
And then the empty bottle after it.
Mother'd never stop him. Dishes and chairs,
The whole house might be smashed and she'd sit by,
Not hearing, as if he'd never had a fit.
I said it was all right for a man to cry.

He did till mother told us what to save
And, clanking, we piled those things it takes to die
Into the Ford and set out for the grave.

Philip Levine

THIS AUTUMN'S PROGRESS

This autumn's progress I have measured by
A quiet courtyard. By its hundred shades of green,
Then by scarlet leaves upon the
Solemn boughs which half a year before
Spring evenings bore into a gentle show
Of furry bloom. While now, today, display
Is made of quite another delicacy.
Of silent, endlessly enchanted death.

Further into simplicity's house
Have I never been than here alone
In a land of fair insistence. Here
Where purpose is subsumed in presence, where
With each leaf's tenuous fall I die
Severally. The pattern formulates
And strangely severed members emphasize
A resolution underneath the grass.

This the time for the horned night, the red
Stream, passion of furred beasts. Passion too
Of the quiet. Smell of leaves, fall's indelible
Fabrication. The incredible phrase of time
Walking giantly through my home, into
Death's raw texture.
Saint Tortoise's sober promenade.

Frederic Will, Jr.

4

TRINITY

1. Man by some private gift combats an inner
Death; the outer he placates. For souls, being
Single and unflattered, will not, plantlike, freeing
Their fruit and seed to the ground, accept winter,
And the dance of molecules. For air and fire
Are partless and shapeless: the blown and burned
expire.

Judge men all together, citified,
Their skills indifferent, each a single graceless
Force, the weights of the afternoon. But bless
Some leaven in that mass: each has denied
A huge logic of corrupiton. Some blade
Will drain each vein and muscle: how is breath
weighed?

At worst, is breath resourceless? Two winds blow,
And the choice is given; one wind grew in springs,
Rose over ice, is reborn with seasons; one clings
Among words, is the trade of cogitation. Sow,
And inspect no farther aspect of your hope.
Air, lived and living, ballasts for the final trope.

2. Does sense take this wind here on my cheek?
How to touch air? More like air than flesh some bird
Infinitely within, in perpetual first-flight, stirred
In the breath, and rose, outside time, to the peak

Of my skull, or of spring. That wind beat at the blinds
One night through. Waking, scarcely a self I received
The force, the prophetic energy. Bird believed
Spring that night, seducing my hope. The mind's

Promise sought strange entrance. It came

With fleshly auspice, moved systems of tissue,
Wove through memory and hunger. True
Responsive wings beat toward their total name.

3. Words are contemplation's object, and its
Stuff. With and of words mind endures
And finds the knitted logic which it is.
Call this movement music: an idea lures

Its symbols to self-definition. Each beat
In time, syntactically upgathered toward
A timeless phrase, is and creates its deed
And dictionary. So metered, children hoard

The moth's logic, flitting from smell to damp,
Self-sculpting with slow symbols. The reader of skies
Or books, the proud lexicographer, would channel and lamp
The old motion. Both are ignorantly wise.

Frederic Will, Jr.

SCYTHETREE

Once you left love with me
like a scythe a man
might hang
, trusting a tree
to stay until a war was won:

wars end: ghosts or men
come home; the trees are
where they stood
And I still have the scythe in
the hard
heartwood.

Kenneth M. Cameron

6

FIRST MORTGAGE

My father's farm looks over quilted valleys
and over five lakes by the glacier's fingers
gutted, to the hills barred with rain-gulleys

And tree-falls: umber on gray in winter,
blue in the renascent days of April:
looks to the south sustaining color

Of virgin woods scaling the baffled hills
that hide, like early days behind the scrim
of time, in days of rain or mist, until

The south dies too to blue deception rim-
ming the wheel-thrown earth and farm's high hill,
vantage-point for the years of interim:

The first field is a rich Seneca burial;
then lilac-rimmed foundation; then the final
towns: and suddenly: we're city people.

Kenneth M. Cameron

BEFORE AN EXHIBITION

In this painting I have shown a harvest: neat
rows in the grain; two trucks; the corner of a barn.
The harvest was then real; much I painted is not.

Yet, I have noticed how my painting burns
under its blue, hot sky, as if I had caught
something of the summer's flame on brush-end, and
borne

It to my sky, to squander real sun on wrought
fields, daring not art's, but harvest's light.
Into this painting I have tried to put

The sun I saw then: not God's sunlight
Or the broad, unshadowed lights of men,
but what I saw, archetype of all suns that have brought

Or taken life. It killed what parts were mine:
I know it ruined what I might have made
an invulnerable, perfect canvas of the mind,

Unbrightened by an alien flame. The seed
dried from within; yet, I cherish now
the vulnerable thing: the something from outside.

Kenneth M. Cameron

POEM

Your eyes hold the paradox
that is a fishbone mistranslated,
buried in the sunrise of self,
like a jazz solo played
on an overlooked cello.
Meaning,
the green lily taller than lightning,
proffers its fault in a hand,
gropes your sleep.
Fishes of death, only symbolic
for the drunken, swim inside
your brain in a group,
meant as tautology.

Fat amoebas cluster,
Filling your ears with ego.
You are alone, now.

George Lee, Jr.

8

two poems from . . . RETURN — WAR TWO

Bunk Fatigue, U.S.A.

"When the war is over," he said. I remember it was raining.
We'd slogged through sloshy water — mud all through our basic training.
The gray small shot of rain were beating like molten solder.
Their striking filled the hutment with an echo that was odder
Than any rain I had heard before; or else it was so in seeming,
Moved by the words of one whom war had set to dreaming;
For the soldier will dream if recruit or if more
Than a seven year veteran of the end of a war.

"When the war is over," he said. He was just a kid of twenty,
Fresh from the easy American life where a kid like him has plenty.
He'd had his first job only a bare six months, and then he was drafted.
I heard him talk on, but my thoughts had been scattered and wafted
Off on a path of their own. And I pondered the words he'd uttered,
He who had never been out where the mortars and big guns muttered.
What knowledge of war's end can be in a young recruit
Just learning to drill, and just learning to shoot?

9

"When the war is over," he said. But a lexicon of meanings
Can lie in five words, each altered and changed by the gleanings
Of each mind's experience and each mind's location,
As food has a different meaning to a man on C Ration.
Different from food at home in the mild civilian
Interior Zone. Yes, the miles between are a million.
And war's end came fast, with a rush, to a man
Short of shells, out of food, on the rock of Bataan.

"When the war is over," he said. And he spoke of what he'd be doing.
And all on their sacks were nodding, their own plans passed for reviewing.
Their dreams. Of marriage. Of travel. Of making a million.
Of liquor and parties. Or only of being civilian.
Dozens of plans, plans of freedom, plans of another future
After the scissors of time would have cut away war's suture.
So they dreamed . . . and some would be crippled . . . and some would be dead.
The rain was beating like solder. "When the war is over," he said.

Rotation

For the last time I walk upon
The grey rock pavements of Dijon.
Beneath a stone of burnished moon
November shines as bright as June.

10

But winter rain clings to the tiles
Of old roofs that reach out for miles;
And winter atmosphere is crisp,
And in the winter sky each wisp
Of fragmentary cloud is fraught
With ice-rings that the North has brought.

And in the narrow, moon-proof street
Where new and medieval meet
The girls on bicycles flit by,
Brief-skirted, showing leg and thigh.
Will-o'-the-wisp their headlights glow;
Thronged, ceaseless, is the restless flow,
Each like an incandescent barque
Borne on the flood-tide of the dark.

In ancient shops the rise of night
Is met with new electric light,
And automobiles hurl their fumes
Into old courtyards and old rooms.
And peasants plod in wooden shoes
Past bright new newsstands with new news.
And Charles the Bold's old palace stays
For newer rulers, newer ways.

Within the Square the street light falls
On ruins of abandoned walls
That once held in their stony care
Rich feudal lords and ladies there.
Those walls of stone: Each crumbling arch
Once heard old armies on the march,
And knew the rush and pageantry
Of ancient days of Burgundy.
Above the buildings, over the town,
The tower of Charles the Bold looks down.

Samuel M. Sargent

11

PAINT

When the old man died, the folks got the old lady
To go to her sister's in Mendocino for a short stay.
And when she walked out of her house to Al's Chevy
It looked as if she were walking from one grave to another.

The Marguerite her daughter and Marguerite's husband
Pitched in for the weekend and fixed the place over.
Waxed up the floors, washed windows, hung fresh curtains,
Even repainted the old lady's bedroom.

It always had been white, off-white, now they went down and bought
One of the new greens called avocado. Something different.
When the old lady got back, about a day early,
They hadn't got the furniture in place, but she could see the effect.

She was nowhere near so pleased as they had hoped for.
Tired from the trip, she looked lost in the avocado.
But her daughter said, Mama cheer up, it will certainly fade some.
So she did.

Josephine Miles

12

IN CENTRAL PARK

"Up from the spray of thy ocean-perishing —
straight up, leaps thy apotheosis." Melville

1. Last night I drove through Pennsylvania hills,
Wind-streaked with snow, gray foldings under the moon,
Bridge-leapt the valleys, tunnelled the ridge stone,
At seventy miles an hour. When dawn rose

Between me and the stars, I was east again
On the spoiled plain of the sea — like coming home,
Drove to Princeton, and through the hollow shell
Returned to the true, old Kahler in his room.

Tonight I reach New York, still driving on —
Chicago yesterday: — the country recalled
Is a rush of long hills lighted by the moon
Between great cities, a sage in his loft, alone.

2. Here in the park I have walked and seen the towers
Rising on the golden air expire in beauty,
And revive again from the dusk, tall shapes returning,
Transfigured into light, shafts of the stars, burning.

And the bare boughs of winter caught and emblazoned
By that ripe fruit beyond them frame the dream city.
I think: Behold the town of a reckless people
Who rocket from the earth, withering behind them.

And I remember Kahler, pacing and grieving
For the lost son, the crucified vision, tugging
His shreds of hair, and the voice of his brooding: "We are
Foreclosed; of the world I no longer write or lecture."

3. Hebrew prophet, old man, abandoned now
By the temporal wave, weaving the vacant dream
In the solitude of the chamber, I hear your words:
"The law of history for all who would rule,

Is use the radical fire, the force that drives;
Our fools forsake the hope from which we spring . . ."
"But who are the fools?" I ask; "The leaders, you mean?"
"Not only they," he says. "Who then?" And he groans:

"It is the trusted people, the election down,
This blind pride of the worst, the course we have run . . ."
(Ah, but the unfurled city on the black wind blown
Ripples a flag of light . . . Who knows, who knows?)

4. And to deal a little whimsically with you, loved sage,
As you pace the floor, tearing the tatters of paleo-
Anthropus fur, what was your world-state but a wilder
Venture of pride, now stranding on these beaches?

And therefore nature of her killing pity
Plants on the luckless mast this bright banner,
Tall in the wind over whirls of the sea-drowning.
Seer, you are right: we are a spendthrift people,

And humility were better and a little wisdom;
But I stand in Central Park and take before me
This moment, on the wing, the great spires glowing;
And the lost heart leaps with pride to die in that beauty.

Charles G. Bell

14

FABLE

The boys have shaken the cherry tree,
and in the emerald grass
cherries burn like blood in tears of glass.

The birds whose food the cherries were
desert the shining skies
and circle the barren earth and cry.

And the sun whose subjects were the birds
totters in golden grief,
then flutters down the heavens like a dark leaf.

And boys whose limbs were golden once
take darkly to their beds,
shrinking work and shrinking play like the dead.

Paul Petrie

FORGIVENESS

Bent beneath the weight of the great, black chest,
following the star that followed pain,
I journeyed, a wiseman, bringing from the west
your wisdom and the heartbreak of my brain.
Not gold or subtle myrrh or frankincense
my gifts. The king who questioned why I came
saw the box, and did not ask the rest.
The way was long, but the way was plain.
Arriving at the town, I found the inn
and found the manger. Neither you nor the child stirred
when I entered. You were crying; the child was thin.
I would not have — but the door creaked and you heard.
The chest crashed to your feet; the lid swung back;
within —
a stone, a riven tomb, a singing bird.

Paul Petrie

SCENE I

The sun's dangling its yellow
feet, again, treading on each uneasy leaf of
green, and popping in and
out of clouds, the sun
cluttering about like an anxious
photographer.

Where once the hot wind nudged each drowsy
flower, waking like a drowsy bride, and
tossed like a cat, in heat, the wind
mewed, and the uneasy bees seized honey
with
weedy mouths, their black abdomens golden
greased with pollen, and like filthy clowns were
bobbing up
and down,

she and I were
walking together, where departing
summer flies, where darkly white
maggots paw and gnaw beneath each newly
pregnant mound with its unnewly born
where he
whose uneasy thoughts like a wild mouse sprawled over
him, who drove us, she and I,
the long way home.

Chris Bjerknes

16

FOUR EXPOSURES

1. Playful birches in the
Where the mind goes off in austerity
Taking the baby to the doctor

: Flexions
Impressions:

The late quartet draws the heart out
Cash the check in the morning
Polio may be latent for years

Improvisations:
Destinies

The sun kills as it blesses
King Canute knew the tides' tactics
Mallarmé was foolish in his lectures?

:Seizures,
Creations:

Never to be serious! Let the jest
Be on one. And no more philosophy,
Know more. Will Star's pups be thoroughbred, or mongrel?

:Plumbers,
Carpenters:

How the world runs to worldliness.
Strength of the soul! Passionate devotion!
Go and get honey rolls and streptomyacin.

Hush-a-bye
Hush-a-bye

2. Rich in dextrins, maltose and dextrose
And nobody knows the answers. Here
Comes Aurelia, with the baby carriage

:Dissemble
Invade:

Once having learned Chinese their subtlety
In linguistic inspissates our English.
Indian music babyfies J. Bach.

:Pretend, and
Invent:

Twice Washbowl our Cape cat had kittens
In the same closet. At four of the morning
She mews, and I let her in the window

"Salutations
Historicities:

Shall I allude to Mrs. Phineas Cuff?
Everybody has a mad neighbor.
Keep your dog from hence, we have a mummy

:Bosch
Angelus Silesius:

They have no bock beer this year.
Pale genius is burning the midnight oil
The literary politicians are giving out the prizes

:Petrifactions
Liquify!

18

3. I dickered with the truth, because
The truth dickered with me. Fractuous
Divagations please the senses

:Presentiments
Hallucinations:

Old years laugh hysterically
At the seriousness of the new.
We have seen too much of death in our time.

:Calculations,
Fervors:

If of anything we were intellectually certain
We could not afford the luxury of the pit.
We would be lost in the found.

:vastness,
Unfound me:

The source is newness evermore uncreate!
It is delicious hardship to steal out of it!
It is handsome to handle the eventuating.

:Gusto
Diamonds:

The baby with her goddess-descending smile then.
Why not? Others have felt it before.
This assurance beyond us from the skies.

:Taken up
Defended:

4. The worst then ever the best. No defeat
That is not a subtle victory.
No victory that is not a defeat.

:Accept
Listen:

It always disturbed me that Job
Gave up his boils. I see now that tragedy
Is good only in a certain framework.

Shakespeare stops.
Homer goes on.

Birds on the boughs, lovers in the haystacks,
Cadillacs, Fords, and cold-water flats.
Lovers couple the theory and the fact.

:Vigor
fashion:

Time is the soul's macaronic specialist.
As the wheel turns, what will come of the wheel?
What songs, what waters, as the wheels turn?

:Trial
Aptitude:

I should have thought the senses best.
Let Plato, let Aristotle lie.
Lie to me then in the white night

Lover
and bride.

Richard Eberhart

20

WHILE THE BUCK DRANK

There was a time when my mind was a glowing bowl
into which all things might dip and be transformed,
fawn into doe and frost to fiery rainbow
for lakes of color lay within my eyelids . . .

there was a time when I wanted the whole world's ill
to bear like antlers from my forehead
and wear a fur of wrong, my only clothes,
to shreds against the scouring bark of spring . . .

now I have learned it is I who am changed in layers,
see my dissembling-warmth, deep-raving frosts
take their red hue from coins the body hoards
against the piteous pleading spendthrift slain

and to a glass-pooled past must creep for drink,
my own sins horned on unforgiving forehead.

Kenneth Pitchford

THE FROZEN YOUTH

Upon the page the scrolling of his script,
like mice-feet patterns dabbled in the snow,
writhed into words; the fallen pen, still tipped
as if with blood, lay in the desklight's glow.
The open door remarked his passage there;
he fled from malted milks and his own soul
into a threadbare wind's unravelled hair.
"When shall I ever learn to shape me whole,
untarnished by the rust of days and hates,
when shall my melting paper find
its marble metamorphosis, and fates
no longer haunt me, merciless and blind?"
The coat he clutches, woven of his years,
moulds him in ice more marble than his tears.

Kenneth Pitchford

LETTER FROM A SELENITE

In the poet's world the gesture is the act.
In the Great Valley of the Alps the shade
is solid, and annihilates without a sound.
Where it blacks off, the pure Platonic sunlight is
a furious absolute. The Earth is round.
Out of the bay of dust the Teneriffes
scale themselves, the light rocks fall
slowly, the lichens are not afraid.

The tide is frozen. The ringing wall
bears Plato's name, but Piton's blade
points to the reality of Nothing; this
in Pico's notch is certain snow
but not in air. Poet, go home.
There is a world where image is not fact.

James Blish

SENACHIE'S LAMENT

The moaned lament on the mead blood bought,
The glory of those who went to Cartraeth and
Rushed like the rushing ninth wave,
The valor of that sword and that
Bard's pity who sang "his sword
Rang in the heads of mothers":
These and the loss — the wood where
Maddened Merlin moaned in darkness.

Ah God, that thieves and whores should merit
Now the great halls and the bright trappings
While poets pine and workmen sick with care
In a world awry, and know that still
Old Merlin calls the western wind.

Robert O. Bowen

THE FIRST YEAR

The hedges grew in close against the house
And in them thrushes built their nest that spring,
The first year people came to live inside,
The first spring these two people lived as one.
He, having known birds' ways before, first saw
Their signs and signalled her to watch them build.
And when the week was out the nest was done,
A rough, crude mass of twigs and leaves below
But smooth and tight inside as if two hands
Instead of beaks had made it firm as love
Could make it to withstand the rain and hold
The heat.
They tiptoed past their window sill
And spoke low and felt themselves trespassers,
Perched up so they could freely see inside
The fresh clean nest.
She could not quite restrain
Herself the day the first egg lay light speckled
To the sky, the timid bird out searching food;
Next day another egg. The mother bird
Had learned it shared its life with two whom it
Would not quite trust as part of its household;
And so it sat where it could watch them both
Across the window sill.

The man had told
How some birds leave their nests and new-laid eggs
When people get too close; so warned, the woman
Kept her place, though never quite; for she
Was part of what she saw and felt the bird

Would understand her presence; so it did,
At any rate it sat there quietly;
Its mate sang out at dawn and dusk alike.

She moralized about the mate's love song
Spilled out for all the world; he gently warned
That heart and mind are seldom quite so large
They love the universe in general.
"I'd hate to have to love a Chinaman
I'd never seen; when we take pains to aim
Love worlds away, it seldom hits the mark;
Love should be aimed only at whites of eyes,
Then it spills over on the world; the bird
Sings for its nest and mate and (if we know)
To lure the neighbor's hungry cat that way."
(He quickly said his end result was hers.)

And then one day the woman saw the change:
The little aughts had suddenly sprung birds,
Or fuzzy motion that would soon be birds.
Embarrassingly pink, they lacked the form
That would have made her eyes feel more at ease.
Awhile she felt too close to their becoming,
Felt so till their becoming was an act
They put on every time the mother bird
Would try to shelter them from sun or rain;
They would pop up like jacks-in-box, and thus
Upset their mother's mother dignity.

One morning when the woman came to look
There was but one bird left, the other flown
Or fallen out — she could not hear or see.
The last swayed wildly, clutching the nest edge;

It hung there desperately the while she watched,
And when she turned away and came again
It too was gone.
Two empty houses then,
For when she thought of that sleek neighbor cat
She cried; he argued logic's helplessness:
The old birds did their best, would try again
Though not, perhaps, in this same season and
The cat was not to blame; the world was made —
But arguments were useless; arms only then
Could bridge the lonely gap the young birds left,
Arms only in the quietness of night
Against that ancient of the coming days.

Marion Montgomery

SONNET

I have forgotten till the trees show buds
and drops like crystal sequins catching light,
that it is winter still; and have ignored
the warning finger of a thousand years.
And if I walked by shallows of the river
where stones took silver fire, convinced of sun
persuading us to vivid ancient springs,
I could at last touch birds prepared to sing.
I have forgotten that the chiding finger
cites ice perhaps tomorrow, death-rubbed sky.
Convinced of sun, if I could find the river,
and touch soft buds like children on the trees
impatient for their summer, you would walk
with your green soul in mine, and never die.

J. M. Rosenberg

OUR BEN

Kiss him so square, he was the wool
that wound that we
were woven by.
This giddied air that girdles us
he shuttered in
so small

he is the dimmest Yankee of them all.

George H. Moorse

OUR GOODMAN

Dark each spring our goodman dies
in hollow wheat
or smuggled under green
in the smart thighs
of the hill.
But will he rise when weeping Gretel calls?
In sleeping chaster wheat he lies
while she
sings to her stream
ish-ish
ish-ish
ish-ish

George H. Moorse

26

THE FEAST

Seldom was a day more chill or trees more bare.
We walked across the fields where small brown birds
Puffed up against the wind to scratch for seed.
And you said:
"I will bring them bread."

You left my side and winter crossed to me.
A hundred birds flew off the earth at once.

Long silence: till at last your form was held
Smaller than a wren, horizon-still.
It waxed and soon your frost-shined face
Drew close:
"Where are the birds?"
I pointed:
"Out in space."

No reproach could fell me more than did
Your shoulders and your small hands letting spill
The sudden snow of white untasted crumbs.

Maxine Cassin

TRAUMATIC CIRCUS

The chimpanzee
(a chip of me)
still runs the long decks fore and aft
or at the red wheel
of his automobile
drives stiffly by with President Taft.

And in my chest all night, all day
and down the tent-wires to my thumb,
to thump and bang and thump away:
The clown still beats the drum.

Around the ring inside my head:
o little lady, ride, still ride!
all pretty, gauzy white, all red —
(sometimes the chimp is by your side).

Oh if you stopped (oh frightened fears!)
or if your lion sank and dropped,
the horn that's ringing in my ears
would burst and all the tent fall down
until the thumping drum had stopped.

Then oh goodbye poor faithful clown!

Herman Salinger

I DO NOT THINK THE STONE

I do not think the stone
would want to be as we,
the thrower not the thrown,
Or the tree be free
to wander curious
from its rooted grass
searching for purpose
in a looking glass.
I do not think the mute beast,
unaware,
at his nocturnal feast
would care to share
a verbal consciousness of fate,
mortal and articulate.
I would, I think, be far more prone
to see in man an urge to stone,
long dreams of anonymity
desiring, in its greenness, only rain
that, tomorrow, will fall again
in silent certainty.

Dennis Lynds

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GUITARIST

the left hand spiders
on the wire web,
precisely weaving,
netting in the green green flies,
the beating golden butterflies,
the burnished purple beetles,
till the whole skein breaks:
lovely tumbling down
of green and gold and purple instants
webbed once
in the wood and wire
by the spidering hand.

the right hand is a hummingbird,
darting at the secret heart of wire and wood,
drawing out a sweet that only bird can savor,
yet altering the air with quetzal-colored sound.

and this is never lost:
genetic in the player's hands,
remembered not in the hearer's ears
but deep,
more deep than touchable,
except by this again.

Sue Gross

OPINION

Selected Poems: 1942-1952. By William Hull, New York: Brigant Press. 130 pp. $2.50.

The first quality that impresses one in the poetry of William Hull is violence. One feels it in the daemonic quality of his tense, rapid rhythm,

> Whilom fierce-forged unparagoned
> prow of my incontinent glee

and in the nervous ellipsis which Hull consistently uses to exclude unimportant syllables from his lines:

> Dream bursts: fragile house frights us:
> lion's unleashed: can adjacent window stand?

One finds it in Hull's vocabulary, in his use of the blunt four letter word, the tag end from nursery rime and jazz song, the coinages and distillations of words. One hears violence in alliterations and other sound effects carried to the limits of endurance:

> No leap latter now can lug
> from clot clutter
> this utter tang;

Evidences of violence can equally be found in Hull's grammar, imagery, poetic structure, and in his ideas and attitudes.

Violence can be more than a description; it can be a charge against a poem, unless its power is brought under control. Instead of proceeding with an anatomy of violence, then, let us look at the poetry as a whole, to ask whether Hull controls the genie he uncorks in these poems. One's impression from a first careful reading consists of two reactions: he is first confused by obscurity; but when he does comprehend, he is impressed by the strength he finds. This quotation well illustrates the impression of strength:

> Old Ahab cried, proud and bloody-brained
> lonely Ahab, seized with maddened pain
> of god blasted from godhead: Ahab bore
> his fire volcanic in bowels' raging core.

Before leaving this poem, one should note the high incidence in it of participles; for participles, both present and past, are one of this poet's chief grammatical tools, which

he uses in lines less immediately clear. "Grapes of Wrath" is a simple poem of two predications (scuppernongs hang, and old grapes distill) complicated by modifying phrases. When comparable patterns are discovered in more difficult poems, their density becomes far less opaque. In fact, one knows what the poet is talking about, he can sense the control and feel the poetry.

One is helped to know the subject matter of individual poems by a knowledge of standard literary reference: mythology, Greek drama, the Bible, Dante, and Melville, plus moderns like Joyce, Eliot, Pounds. Like Eliot, whose literary influence he exorcises, Hull jumps from reference to reference; like Joyce he compounds words. In many respects his poetry is like Pound's. Yet, on the whole, Hull has assimilated his influences into a medium and a message that is his own. As a result these poems have a consistent stamp, remarkable in a first volume of poems. After reading these one should be able to say "Hull" upon first hearing another of his. Most younger poets are busy assimilating the poetry of the previous generation, so to have a voice of one's own is an achievement.

Stated in general terms, Hull's message is hardly original. It is standard romanticism with strong overtones of Nietzsche and D. H. Lawrence.

> Therefore, Watchman,
> charge us with the fury that's the fiery grandeur of god,
> the lightning to thunder the clap of begin the beginning
> forever in the blazing heart of man that's sun
> to jolt this little punctual earth to frenzy
> of hiving hot honey,
> god's heart.

In poem after poem, Hull decries our "brain valleyed with bones," wants

> to lilt us sweetly into somnolence,
> flush our bitterly stored comb of reason
> for sun's, our farring sun's last trick of honey-treason.

"Honey," as can be seen from these lines, is a symbol for the good, the sensuous, the poetic, the living, as contrasted to the dry bones of arid anguish and of intellect. Though the old religion is dead to Hull, and though our

godless age has therefore terrors of its own, and modern man feels alienation from just about everything, feeling can yet prevail, aided by poetry. The summary sounds banal. The poems do not, as they embroider one aspect after another of the theme.

The reason the poems are never banal is, again, their violence. Feeling, repressed, explodes as fury, and can become lovely feeling again only after the smoke has cleared. Hull documents each stage of this process also. Contrast

> The dead the dead the dead
> are clustered ruin in the living dead,
> thick and rotten-sweet, undigested,
> breed the grubs that coiling drain our living head,

with

> Coolly I felt a curve:
> silent fins slid
> their arcs glistening amid
> the silver brimming nerve

or note the vision of the final stanza of the volume, the end toward which all strives:

> And then when
> heart's there, bare,
> bears beauty's beauty,
> fire-brief like leaf,
> but greenly, serenely,
> it's found, downless.

"The Up and Down of Dandy Brown — in seven stations" ought to receive special mention; for it is the most successful of the longer poems in the volume. It is a jazz-time miracle play with a modern setting, and brings out strongly qualities that another review might have emphasized in connection with the whole volume: qualities that show Hull as gay, comic, satirical, yet intensely lyrical. One stanza must be quoted: Dandy has just seduced Melinda Lou:

> Dandy outsang the hounds
> as he vaulted into town:
> and Melinda lay, rounding, soundless.

Selected Poems: 1942-1952 is the first publication of the Brigant Press, and is a handsome volume, with a cover adapted from a drawing by John Rembert. **D.M.S.**

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THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL
Volume 5 - Number 3 Spring 1955

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SPECIAL NOTICE

The second annual poetry contest, "Annual Award for New Poets of the Midwest," has been announced jointly by The University of Chicago, Poetry Magazine, and The Beloit Poetry Journal. Any poet, not previously published in book form who is a resident of either Ohio, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, or Missouri is eligible. Manuscripts for judging (not more than 20 double-spaced pages) should be sent to: New Poets of the Midwest Award, University College, 19 South LaSalle St., Chicago, Ill. Deadline is May 1, 1955. Judges are Henry Rago, Galway Kinnell, and Robert H. Glauber. All entries will be acknowledged.

B